

Understanding Nutrition: Primer Module on CalFresh

CalFresh Overview and Administration

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, provides nutrition benefits that help individuals and families purchase food. In 2010, as required by state legislation,^a the California Food Stamp Program was renamed CalFresh.

This new name, developed through a research-driven rebranding process, reflects the role of CalFresh in supporting health, nutrition, and California agriculture. CalFresh benefits help mitigate hunger and food insecurity and prevent overweight and obesity among low-income households. By supplementing household food budgets, CalFresh benefits also function as an income support.

Federally, SNAP is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state level, CalFresh is administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). California's 58 counties have local administrative authority over CalFresh. The federal entitlement status of CalFresh/SNAP means that all eligible applicants have a legal right to receive benefits. The federal government funds all of these benefits and half of the state's CalFresh administrative costs. The state and counties are responsible for the remaining CalFresh administrative costs, contributing 35 and 15 percent, respectively. For a history of SNAP/Food Stamps, go to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Legislation/about.htm>

Eligibility^b

CalFresh eligibility is based on several factors including income, disability, age, and citizenship status. The maximum allowable gross income is 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG). Households with elderly or disabled members are not subject to gross income criteria but must have a *net* monthly income at or below the FPG.

Certain documented immigrants are eligible for CalFresh. All undocumented immigrants are not.

Nationwide, households receiving benefits through the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) may not simultaneously participate in SNAP (CalFresh in California). Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are also ineligible for CalFresh in California.

^a Assembly Bill 433 (Beall) introduced in 2008; Chaptered as Section 18900.1 of the Welfare and Institutions Code.

^b For more on CalFresh eligibility in relation to SSI recipients please see: *Cash-Out in California: A History of Help and Harm*. California Food Policy Advocates. August 2003. Available at <http://www.cfpa.net/CashoutinCA2003.pdf>

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California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)

In California, permanent, documented noncitizens who are ineligible for CalFresh/SNAP due only to their immigration status may receive nutrition benefits through the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP).

Established in 1997, CFAP provides state-funded benefits. At the county level, CFAP is administered alongside CalFresh. From the participant perspective, there is no distinction between CFAP and CalFresh benefits.

Able-bodied adults (18-49 years old) without dependents (ABAWDs) must fulfill work requirements in order to be eligible for CalFresh. Specifically, ABAWDs must work at least 20 hours per week (or an average of 80 hours per month), or must participate in an approved work activity, such as vocational training, for 20 hours per week. ABAWDs who do not meet these requirements are limited to 3 months of CalFresh benefits in a 36-month period, unless granted a waiver.^a

Participation and Benefits

During federal fiscal year^b (FFY) 2010, average monthly CalFresh participation was 3.2 million individuals.¹ California's SNAP/CalFresh participation rates have consistently ranked among the lowest in the nation.²

- From 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which data are available), CalFresh served approximately one-third of California's eligible working poor³ and no more than half of all eligible individuals in the state⁴ (see Table 1).
- From FFY 2002 to 2006, CalFresh served no more than 11 percent of the state's eligible seniors (individuals 60 years of age and older).⁵

Over 70 percent of CalFresh households include children, and 75 percent have female heads of households.⁶

CalFresh Outreach

Through its *CalFresh Outreach* campaign, the *Network for a Healthy California* works to increase CalFresh participation through use of media and contracts with 7 nonprofit organizations to conduct outreach efforts in 48 counties.

Over 88 local partners educate their communities about program benefits, pre-screen individuals and families for potential eligibility, assist with the CalFresh application, and promote CalFresh as a good nutrition program.

The *Network* CalFresh Outreach campaign is funded with SNAP funds through an agreement with CDSS.

For more information, go to: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CPNS/Pages/FoodStampOutreach.aspx>

Table 1: CalFresh Participation Rates from 2004-2008

Year	Participation Rate Among All Eligible Individuals	Participation Rate Among Eligible Working Poor
2004	46%	34%
2005	50%	34%
2006	50%	36%
2007	48%	33%
2008 (latest available data)	50%	31%

Sources: USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2006-2010). *Reaching Those In Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008* [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/SNAPPartState.htm>

USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2006-2010). *Reaching Those In Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008* [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/SNAPPartState.htm>

^a ABAWD waivers can be granted to individuals by a county case worker *or* to all individuals in a geographical area. States are able to request ABAWD waivers from USDA for areas that have high unemployment rates or documented job shortage/labor surplus. For more information on waiver criteria, visit: <http://foodstampguide.org/waiver-of-abawd-requirements-excusing-people-from-the-three-month-cut-off/>. California law requires that the state (CDSS) apply for a waiver whenever an area within the state meets the eligibility criteria.

^b The federal fiscal year (FFY) is from October 1 through September 30. For example, FFY 2010 is from October 1, 2009, to September 30, 2010. The California state fiscal year is from July 1 through June 30.

In FFY 2010, the average monthly CalFresh benefit was \$147⁷ per person and \$341⁸ per household. Participants may use benefits to purchase a variety of foods including breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, meats, and dairy products at authorized retailers such as superstores, supermarkets, grocery stores, and farmers' markets.^a

All CalFresh benefits are delivered through an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) debit card. This system helps mitigate the stigma associated with redeeming paper stamps, improves efficiency at the point of purchase, and improves the detection of possible fraud.⁹

In addition to CalFresh, EBT cards are used to deliver other types of benefits. For example, if a household is enrolled in CalFresh and CalWORKS (cash assistance), both benefits are provided via a single EBT card.

Nutrition Education & Obesity Prevention

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funds states to provide nutrition education to low-income individuals and families eligible for SNAP and, with a federal waiver, households with incomes up to 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

The Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention program (NEOP), formerly known as SNAP-Ed, aims "to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. . . ." ^a

A provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, NEOP allows for 100 percent federal funding (no longer requiring match) to states and focuses on evidence-based and outcome-driven Nutrition Education Plans with an emphasis on obesity prevention.^b Total NEOP funding is capped nationally at \$375 million, but annually adjusted based on the Consumer Price Index.

The new vision for NEOP is in response to escalating obesity rates and will provide greater opportunity to focus on obesity prevention in addition to nutrition education.

For information on NEOP, please go to page 8 of the primer module: *The Role of Government: The State System*.

^a USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2011). *SNAP-Ed Plan Guidance FY 2012* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fns/Guidance/FY2012SNAP-EdGuidance.pdf>

^b USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (January 2011). *Implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, SNAP Education Provision* [PDF document]. Retrieved from http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/pdfs/Healthy_hungry-Free_Kids_Act_2010.pdf

^a SNAP/CalFresh participants can also purchase seeds and plants to grow food. They cannot purchase nonfood items, foods that can be eaten in the store, alcohol, tobacco, or pre-prepared hot food. Elderly, disabled, and homeless individuals who participate in the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program may purchase prepared meals from CalFresh-certified restaurants. Operating the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program is an option available to all California counties but is not required. For more information on the Restaurant Meals Program, visit: <http://www.ebtproject.ca.gov/restaurantmeals.aspx>

Measures Adopted to Increase CalFresh Participation

Over time, California has made significant strides to streamline the CalFresh application process and improve participation among eligible individuals, including:

Finger-Imaging Requirement Removed

On October 6, 2011, AB 6 (Fuentes) was signed into law, removing the finger-imaging requirement for CalFresh (effective January 1, 2012).^a Prior to this change, all adults in households applying for CalFresh were required to provide digital fingerprints at a county CalFresh office.

With the enactment of AB 6 in October 2011, California joined 48 other states in the nation that do not require finger-imaging.

The finger-imaging requirement, which was intended to prevent duplicate-aid fraud,^b deterred eligible Californians from participating in CalFresh.¹⁰ The requirement also cost the state millions of dollars in annual maintenance fees for the finger-imaging system.¹¹ The California State Auditor twice reported that such costs were not outweighed by the system's capacity to prevent fraud.¹² Beyond finger-imaging, CalFresh employs several effective and efficient measures to detect, deter, and prevent fraud. With the enactment of AB 6 in October 2011, California joined 48 other states in the nation that do not require finger-imaging.

Semi-Annual Reporting Adopted

In addition to eliminating the finger-imaging requirement, AB 6 (Fuentes) authorized California's move from quarterly to semi-annual reporting for CalFresh (to be implemented between April 1 and October 1 of 2013). Prior to this change, California was the only state in the nation that did not allow CalFresh/SNAP recipients to report their income and household status using a simplified system such as semi-annual reporting. As shown in other states, semi-annual reporting can reduce administrative workload, improve program accuracy, and help keep eligible participants enrolled.

Opportunity Created to Improve Senior Enrollment

On October 6, 2011, AB 69 (Beall) was signed into law, authorizing a new method of reaching the 95 percent of eligible households that include Social Security recipients 60 years of age and older who are not receiving CalFresh benefits. In counties that opt to implement this method, seniors applying for retirement (Social Security) benefits will be given the option of having their application information shared with a county CalFresh office that will use this information to complete a CalFresh application. This enrollment method will increase seniors' awareness of CalFresh benefits. This method will also save time and reduce paperwork burdens for both seniors and CalFresh caseworkers.

Asset Test Eliminated

In 2011, CDSS fully implemented a state law that removes the asset test for all CalFresh applicants. Now, CalFresh recipients do not have to spend down their savings in order to qualify for CalFresh. This change allows low-income households to receive nutrition benefits and accrue savings that help guard against unexpected hardships.

^a The passage of AB 6 removed the finger-imaging requirement for CalFresh, but it continues for the state's welfare program, known as CalWORKs.

^b Duplicate-aid fraud occurs when an individual receives benefits from two different jurisdictions, such as two counties within California.

Phone Interviews Offered as Option

In 2009, USDA approved California's request to waive the face-to-face interview requirement for CalFresh applicants. The waiver is now an option for all counties in the state. Where implemented, the option allows CalFresh applicants to complete an interview over the phone rather than in a county office. This provides all households, particularly working households, with improved access to CalFresh.

Flexibility Created for ABAWDs

During difficult economic times, able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) in California may be exempted from work requirements and time limits on CalFresh participation. In 2006, California enacted a law that required CDSS to automatically apply for an ABAWD waiver on behalf of any county that is eligible for a geographical waiver.^a Eligibility for such waivers is contingent upon high unemployment rates or labor surpluses.

Converted from Paper Stamps to EBT

In 1996, federal welfare reform required all states to switch from paper coupons to electronic transfer systems for the distribution of SNAP benefits by 2002. By 2004, all 58 counties in California had established the EBT card as the delivery system for CalFresh benefits. As noted earlier, the EBT system helps mitigate stigma and improve efficiency and detection of possible fraud.

Restrictions on Car Ownership Eliminated

In 2003, California adopted a statute that exempts the value of vehicles from asset calculations used to determine CalFresh eligibility. This change allows low-income Californians to both own a reliable vehicle and receive nutrition assistance.

Nutrition Assistance Program Created for Documented Immigrants

The 1996 federal Welfare Reform Act made certain documented immigrants ineligible for CalFresh/SNAP. In response, California established the California Food Assistance Program, which provides state-funded benefits to documented immigrants who are barred from receiving federally funded CalFresh benefits due only to their immigration status. CFAP was enacted in 1997.

For more information on CalFresh, please visit:

- CDSS' CalFresh page: <http://www.calfresh.ca.gov/>
- CFPA's CalFresh page: <http://cfpa.net/calfresh>
- California Guide to the Food Stamp Program: <http://foodstampguide.org/>
- USDA's SNAP page: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/>
- USDA page on the history of SNAP/Food Stamps: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Legislation/about.htm>

^a A county retains the right to opt out of an ABAWD waiver through a vote by its county supervisors.

END NOTES

- ¹ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (June 2011). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Participation (Persons)* [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/15SNAPpartPP.htm>
- ² USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2006-2010). *Reaching Those In Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008* [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/SNAPPartState.htm>
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Cunnyngham, K. (September 2010). *State Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility and Participation Among Elderly Individuals* [PDF document]. Retrieved from http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/nutrition/SNAP_elderly.pdf
- ⁶ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (October 2010). *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2009* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/SNAP/SNAPPartHH.htm>
- ⁷ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (June 2011). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Benefit Per Person* [Web page]. Retrieved from [http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/18SNAPavg\\$PP.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/18SNAPavg$PP.htm)
- ⁸ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (June 2011). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Benefit Per Household* [Web page]. Retrieved from [http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/19SNAPavg\\$HH.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/19SNAPavg$HH.htm)
- ⁹ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (October 2011). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Electronic Benefit Transfer* [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/>
- ¹⁰ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (December 2009). *Understanding the Determinants of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Final Report* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/Determinants.pdf>
- ¹¹ CDSS. (2010). *November 2010 Subvention Methodology* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/localassistanceest/Jan11/EstimatesMethodologies.pdf>
- ¹² California State Auditor. (January 2003). *Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System: The State Must Weigh Factors Other Than Need and Cost-Effectiveness When Determining Future Funding for the System* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2001-015.pdf> and
California State Auditor. (March 2011). *Department of Social Services: For the CalWORKs and Food Stamp Programs, It Lacks Assessments of Cost-Effectiveness and Misses Opportunities to Improve Counties' Antifraud Efforts* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/sr2011/2009-101.pdf>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This module on CalFresh is one component of *Understanding Nutrition: A Primer on Programs and Policies in California*. Go to www.ccrwf.org to access additional modules.

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